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THE HONGKONG DISPENSARY.

Established A.D. 1841.

Hongkong, 28th August, 1906.

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Only communications relating to the news columns should be sent to the Editor. Correspondents are requested to forward their names and addresses with communications addressed to the Editor, not for publication, but as evidence of good faith.

DEATH.

Mr. Oscar Winkler, formerly of Hongkong, died at Hamburg, on the 25th inst.

THE DAILY PRESS.

HONGKONG, AUGUST 28th, 1906.

Is the course of an interesting article on the Russian Volunteer Fleet, in the last issue of *Chambers' Journal* by Mr. John DILL ROSS, some significant facts are given which are worth noting at the present juncture of affairs, when the Franco-Russian alliance is being placed so much in evidence by our Gallie friends. Mr. Ross, we may premise, writes as the open admirer of Russia, and commences his paper by an expression of satisfaction that "the clouds of national prejudice which have so long 'reaped' Englishmen and Russians are at last clearing away." He also hopes that with the disappearance of old time feuds a friendship will spring up between the two nations that will work for the best interests of both and of peace throughout Europe and Asia. Mr. Ross makes the passage from Singapore to Odessa in the *Ordi*, one of the newest and fastest ships of the Volunteer Fleet, and believes he is the only Englishman who has had that experience. He therefore may claim to have learned something about this fleet that has been called into existence by a national subscription and become an important factor in Russia's maritime position. If he has a bias it is in favour of the Russians, who have by their energy and generosity raised up such a useful adjunct to the Russian Imperial Navy. The origin of the *Dobro Polka Flot* (the Fleet of the Good Will) was the enthusiasm of the Russian people during the Russo-Turkish War, at which time it was discovered that the Russian Government had not sufficient transports at its command for the purposes of the war, and hence the formation of the fleet. The vessels first purchased were old Atlantic liners, and others, which have long since been replaced by the finest vessels which can be built on the Tyne and the Clyde. Mr. Ross says the *Peterburg*, *Saratoff*, and *Ordi* can all steam their eighteen knots and are the fastest ships running east of the Suez Canal. It is no doubt perfectly correct, as Mr. Ross says, that the Volunteer Fleet has had a marked influence on the tea trade of China. The Russian merchant to-day pays a very different price for freight by these fast steamers from what he did in the old days by the costly and uncertain overland route, and the price having been so greatly lowered the consumption of the article in Russia has greatly increased. Indeed, owing to the competition of India and Ceylon having brought down the demand for Chinese tea in the British market, Russia is now the chief customer for Hankow tea. A trade much smaller but nevertheless of growing dimensions is springing up in oil-seeds, poppy, and other tropical products from the Straits Settlements and Ceylon, which also helps to provide freight for the fleet.

Mr. Ross fully recognizes the fact, and how it affects our policy, that the Russian Government has decided to build a great fleet in the Eastern waters. He says that the steamers are commanded and officered by officers of the Imperial Navy, and although the ships carry no armament the facilities doubtless exist for placing it on board either at Sebastopol or Vladivostok as occasion may require. "Here then," he exclaims, "no war ships capable of carrying from fifteen hundred to two thousand troops, of a speed that no vessel East of the Suez Canal can approach, and of an almost indefinite coal-endurance, for the 'Volunteers' have a bunker capacity of several hundreds of tons of coal, and would most likely be at their best steam-trim with something like two thousand tons of coal in their holds as dead-weight. What six or seven such cruisers might do amongst our shipping all the way from Suez to Japan is hard to say. They would be no nothing to our 'escorts' them. Our Atlantic 'fliers' even if they had not other work to do, could not possibly get to the Straits of Malacca or the China Sea in time; and it is well to remember that the Peninsular and Oriental liner which finds its way to the Far East is but a 12 or 13 knot craft, sent there most likely because she is not fast enough for 'her Australian service.' He goes on to point out that cables are apt to get out of working order in times of protracted peace, and are still more liable to be 'interrupted' during time of war, while even if the telegraph was available the admiral might not always have a fast cruiser at his immediate disposal. Mr. Ross is evidently disposed to advocate an alliance with Russia, with whom he thinks we should be fast friends, but that does not blind him to the necessity of Great Britain being prepared for all eventualities, for he says:—"It seems inconceivable, to say the least of it, to spend millions on our navy and our fortified coasting stations in the Far East, while the fastest steamers in seas where British interests are so important fly a foreign flag. Our Russian friends are surely teaching us that we should have vessels of a certain 'type' designed for permanent service in 'Eastern waters.' The steamers of the Canadian Pacific Company are the nearest to the mark, but there are but three *Empresses* and probably only one would be available at short notice. The moral is that the British should increase the subsidy paid to the P. & O. S. N. Co., and require them to put on the service eighteen knot liners which would be available for fast cruises in the event of war. Here is a matter for the local branch of the Navy League to take up. British trade in Eastern seas is so vast and so valuable that we cannot allow it to be exposed to possible attacks. We are friendly with Russia and earnestly desire to continue so, but however satisfied we may be now and in the future of the pacific intentions of the Czar it is surely the height of folly to invite attack by a show of weakness. The maxim that the best way to preserve peace is to be prepared for war ought never to be lost sight of by those responsible for the defence of the Empire.

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